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Marty Williamson, general manager and head coach of the Niagara IceDogs, is back on the ice after his 2014-15 season was cut short by a heart problem. See Page 2 for the story.



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UPFRONT

■ **HOCKEY:** IceDogs coach Marty Williamson back behind the bench after heart attack last spring

From the brink to the rink

JOHN LAW
Postmedia Network

It didn't feel like it at the time, passed out in the shower, but Marty Williamson knows it was the best thing that could have happened to him.

Otherwise, he might not be here, discussing another season behind the bench for the Niagara IceDogs. Discussing anything, really.

It was last March, as the team was heading to Erie for a late season game. It was Williamson's sixth season as coach, and one of his toughest. The IceDogs got off to a miserable start, but surged in the second half to make a play-off push. Williamson hopped in the shower feeling dizzy, but brushed it off. Then he blacked out. He woke up a short time later, disoriented with a small cut on his head.

"I phoned my wife and said, 'I just kinda passed out,' he recalls. "I didn't know if I was not just feeling well, so I came to the rink."

When he knew something was up. Everyone was telling him he didn't look good. He was told to go to the team doctor who informed him his heart rate was at 170.

Off to the hospital he went, where doctors gave him something to steady his heart. But during a follow-up visit, he got the feeling something was wrong. Sure enough, they informed him he had something called a bicuspid aortic valve, in which one of the valves connecting the heart and the aorta is faulty. It occurs in about four per cent of the male population.

The news didn't get better: The resulting aneurysm of his aorta was already in the danger zone.

Fairly normal is about two to two-and-a-half centimetres, and I was into the seven to eight centimetres (range)," he says. "Which is a big concern. (The doctor) said I can't have any excitement and I must rest, rest."

The problem? The IceDogs were in the second round of the



JOHN LAW/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Marty Williamson, head coach and general manager for the Niagara IceDogs, is back on the ice starting Tuesday after his 2014-15 season was cut short by a heart attack. He is photographed during the first day of the Niagara IceDogs training camp at the Meridian Centre.

playoffs, trailing the Oshawa Generals two games to none. Game 3 was a must-win at home.

"I said, 'I'll just stay calm on the bench, I won't get too excited about anything.' But my wife had called (IceDogs co-owner) Bill Burke, and told him what the deal was here. Bill met me at the front door and said, 'You're not coaching this evening.'"

Burke, who purchased the former Mississauga IceDogs franchise in 2007 with his wife, Denise, has long touted his OHL team as a family. Which includes the coach. As hard as it was — in the middle of an unexpected play-off run — he wasn't letting Williamson near the ice.

"The doctor said he can't be on the bench, so I cut him off," recalls Burke. "It was an emotional time for both of us for sure, because he's such a competitor."

"He said, 'I'm OK, I just

won't yell at the refs.' He was going to watch the game from the coach's office, then decided it would be too stressful so he went home."

Williamson recalls the frustration of that night. He wasn't in pain. He was ready to go. His team needed him.

"I was still in disbelief," he says. "I didn't think it was as serious as it was. I don't feel any symptoms. It's not like I've got chest pain, I wasn't passing out any more. It's not a heart attack. It's the aorta valve that goes to your brain, and it's expanding. It bursts, you have very little chance of living."

The IceDogs won Game 3 7-3, but lost the series in five games. It stung then, but Burke is relieved now it ended so early.

"If we weren't going to win it all I'm glad we lost then, so (Marty) could just get better."

With the team eliminated from the playoffs, Williamson had plenty to think about head-

“The doctor said he can't be on the bench, so I cut him off. It was an emotional time for both of us for sure, because he's such a competitor.”

Bill Burke

ing into his open heart surgery on May 13. He was 52, spending most of his life in hockey's extreme highs and lows. He had just gone through an incredibly stressful season.

And it took passing out in the shower to possibly save his life. "This is kind of the thing that happens to people in their mid-

30s when they just drop," he says. "I'm very fortunate. This thing has been building and they found it. The racing heart is not a symptom of the aneurysm — they're two separate things — but if I hadn't passed out that day, they would have never found the aneurysm."

"It was the luckiest thing that happened to me."

Williamson thought the worst was over. And by worst, he means having his chest cut open for several hours of surgery. Once inside, doctors realized the aneurysm was bigger than anticipated.

"They basically did a graft from my heart all the way from my heart to the top of my neck," he says. "The aorta artery is all brand new now."

But then his original problem returned — the racing heart. As he was trying to recover from major surgery, Williamson's ticker caused six trips to the emergency room.

"I was exhausted. It was like

running two marathons. I was just so tired, and I was telling them, 'Get this thing to stop.'"

"That's when it got a little bit serious," he recalls. "I've got this broken chest so I can barely move, everything's painful, and now I can't get my heart to stop racing."

Doctors were stymied until they finally found the medication to steady his heart. Williamson took it all summer, quitting just before last Tuesday's start of the IceDogs' training camp at Meridian Centre.

He's beaming as he walks the hallway leading to the rink. The parents of a recently drafted player stop him, telling him he looks great. Slimmer. One of the benefits of his ordeal is that Williamson has lost nearly 30 pounds.

He feels better. He's certainly thrilled with this year's IceDogs. But there's more appreciation for his life outside of hockey as well. It's only now he realizes what his wife Deb went through last spring, as he was wrapped up in the playoffs.

He wanted to coach. She wanted her husband to come home.

"You could see the stress on my wife, and my kids," he says. "My wife thought I was crazy, and to her credit she phoned Bill. I was in the disabled stall, and she knew how serious this thing was. I appreciate everything she did."

"And Bill and Denise were just phenomenal. How supportive they were to my wife and family... I'll always be grateful."

For his part, Burke is happy to have his coach back. And his friend.

"We went out the other day for lunch and he had a salad," he says. "Not that he was ever a bad eater, but he says he knows he has to be a little more careful. I know he'll do a great job."

"It was a heck of a summer for him, and a heck of a summer for all of us. It was hard to keep your focus."

john.law@sunmedia.ca

TOURISM

Circle route signage raises cyclists' ire

DON FRASER
Postmedia Network

Cyclists using the Greater Niagara Circle Route say fading and inadequate signs are putting the brakes on a key tourism draw.

"Enough money hasn't been spent on improving the Circle Route," said Rita Dillon, president of the Niagara Free-wheelers Bicycle Touring Club.

"If you cycle the route, you would have great difficulty getting from one end to the other," she said. "Over the years the signs have become so faded they are no longer visible."

Dillon and other club members specifically point to poor signage along the corridor as a major issue.

Often, when a trail ends at a road, there is nothing to indicate where it continues, she said. Nor, is there any indication which community the rider is passing through, or where they might find food and accommodation.

The location of the Port Robinson ferry location — as one example — can be a mystery for cyclists, she said.

Dillon said the Free-wheelers have been redoubling efforts since 2011 to bring attention to the problems, with limited success.

Free-wheelers made a presentation to the Greater Niagara Circle Route Committee, rode the route with members of the engineering departments of St. Catharines, Thorold and Welland, and sent a report to Regional Council.

Other concerns addressed to the Region in writing include excessive barriers along the route, and proper maintenance.

The Greater Niagara Circle Route trails system, created by Niagara Region, consists of 140-km of mostly off-road, paved trails for walking, cycling or rollerblading.

It follows the Welland Canal from St. Catharines to Port Colborne, an old CN rail line to Fort Erie, the Niagara Parkway to Niagara-on-the-Lake and Lakeshore Road back to St. Catharines.

The route has been funded by the region, a number of municipalities and governments and well as the private sector.

Brian Basy, a Pelham regional councillor and Circle Route committee member, said Circle Route money isn't as flush as Dillon maintains.

A big problem is varying sign standards amongst municipalities where the route goes through, Basy said.

"It does not make sense, where cycling is one of the Region's prime tourist attractions, to have 12 different municipalities all doing different signage," he said.

"We're seeing a bit of a breakthrough," Basy said, adding that the Circle Route is allocating \$10,000 worth of additional signage this year. The Welland Canals

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Recreational Parkway is also improving signage.

Earlier this year, a meeting involving route stakeholders, was also held regarding signage and route way-finding. "The topic was looking at sign (customization)," he said.

"It is a work in progress, but we need to get an agreement on a sign template ... we're far closer today than we were six months ago."

Basy said Niagara Region's public works is also entering into a transportation master plan study, with way-finding and signage on that agenda.

"With all of these things under way, it will now get the attention it truly deserves," he said.

Meanwhile, Dillon also pointed to positive work being done by Venture Niagara on the route's behalf.

Susan Morin, community economic development manager for economic-stimulating agency Venture Niagara, said in January Venture launched a Niagara Cycling Tourism Centre in Thorold. It has a corresponding website www.niagaracyclingtourism.com.

"Yes (guests) are getting lost, they're getting lost in different areas between Welland and Port Colborne," she said, adding the centre website can also be used as a resource, and the circle route has also an online map.

There are also areas "cautioned" in difficult-to-cycle road areas between Niagara-on-the-Lake and St. Catharines.

She said last March, Niagara Region hosted an active transportation summit, which had signage in general as a top priority.

"We know there are gaps along the route," she said. "And signs are the biggest gap."

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Help to increase protection of Fonthill Kame

DAVE ADGUSTYN
for PelhamNews

As I wrote about in the spring, the Ontario government is reviewing the Greenbelt Plan, Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, Oak Ridges Moraine Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan.

In April, I wrote to the expert advisory panel overseeing this review and implored its members to increase the protection of the Fonthill Kame. I recently sent another letter to the panel, and I am hoping that you will, too.

The Fonthill Kame-Delta is Niagara's rare, 75-metre-tall, 1,000-hectare landmark that was formed by retreating glaciers 13,000 years ago.

As the "hill" in Fonthill and Shorthills and the "ridge" in Ridgeville, the kame boasts

the highest point in the Niagara region and serves as a significant water recharge area and forms the headwaters of the Twelve Mile Creek. Further, the kame's microclimatic and soil conditions create an ideal environment for tender fruit including peaches, sweet and sour cherries, and plums.

The Ministry of Natural Resources identified the Fonthill Kame as provincially significant in 1975 and as a provincial "Area of Natural and Scientific Interest" (ANSI) in 1988 as a way to help restrict development. The province also protected parts of the kame with general provisions in either the Niagara Escarpment Plan or specific provisions in the 2005 Greenbelt Plan.

And, after considerable public feedback, research and scientific evaluation, the MNR confirmed a new ANSI boundary for the kame in October 2013.

As the province reviews the Greenbelt Plan and the Niagara Escarpment Plan, it could inadvertently lessen these protections.

That's why I wrote the expert panel in April and urged it to reinforce the ANSI re-designation by increasing the protection of the Fonthill Kame in provincial land use plans.

During the summer, Niagara Region approved maps and commentary as part of its submission to the expert panel. In that submission, regional council reiterated its request that the lands forming part of the "total morphology" of the Fonthill Kame be recognized and protected.

In fact, Niagara Region suggested that lands as identified through scientific study by expert Dr. Menzies be added to the Niagara Escarpment Plan for increased protection.

Now, I am asking you to provide similar feedback to the panel this month; please let

it know that you are interested in protecting the kame via the Niagara Escarpment plan to help curtail further aggregate extraction or development.

Please e-mail your comments to land-use-planningreview@ontario.ca or send mail to: Land Use Planning Review, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ontario Growth Secretariat, 777 Bay St., Suite 425 (4th floor), Toronto, Ont., M5G 2E5.

Thank you, again, for helping to further protect the Fonthill Kame so that its distinctive features, microclimate and water recharge functions might be better safeguarded for future generations.

Check out links for documents and past columns at www.pelhammayordave.blogspot.com. You may contact Mayor Dave at mayordave@pelham.ca with questions or to suggest future topics.

Shipwrecks — Dorothy Secunda

SKIP BILHAM
for Postmedia Network

Dorothy Secunda was a refrigerated cargo carrier and often handled frozen fish.

It was built at Viareggio, Italy, in 1968 and the 82.8-metre-long vessel sailed for Oceanfrigo under the flag of Italy.

The vessel made a rare Great Lakes visit in 1970 but spent the rest of its career in ocean trading. It became *Ice Star* under the flag of Denmark in 1976 and *Frio Kynos*, Cypriot registry, in 1979. It did not last the year.

The vessel was anchored off the very busy port of Lagos, Nigeria, when it was hit by the motor vessel *Armada*. The vessel was badly damaged and sank but the crew was rescued. *Armada* was a British vessel that never made it to the Great Lakes and it was scrapped in China with fire damage as *Teti* in 1990.



Dorothy Secunda is shown in Montreal in October 1970 in this photo by Rene Beauchamp.

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ONLINE



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■ EDUCATION

Niagara College hosting first orientation trunk sale

MICHELLE ALLENBERG
Postmedia Network

What better way to start the new school year than by supporting a local charity.

Niagara College will be hosting its first Orientation Trunk Sale on Sunday from noon until 3 p.m. at the Welland campus. The sale is part of the United Way Campaign with Niagara College.

Karen McGrath, director of library and bookstore services and co-chair of Niagara College's 2015-16 United Way campaign, said this year the school hopes to raise \$40,000.

Money raised at the trunk

sale through the reservation of parking spots will be donated to United Way of South Niagara. Vendor spaces cost \$25 for a single spot, or \$40 for a double. The spaces are available on a first come first serve basis.

The trunk sale will be a rain or shine event. Vendors are able to keep all money made at the sale.

The Trunk sale is a free event during orientation week and will include a variety of activities. The community can look forward to face painting, bouncy castles, an inflatable maze and a free barbecue.

"We are hoping to have this as a community event as well

as for Niagara College," said Ali Koblinksi, student experience co-ordinator from the centre for student engagement and leadership.

"We are very excited... We try to host an event to introduce the students to the community," she said.

Lesley Calvin, manager of student engagement and leadership and co-chair of the college's United Way campaign, said "the event is a great way for our students to get, or get rid of, some great items at a student-friendly price point as we usher in the school year."

michelle.allenberg@postmedia.ca



POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Niagara College hopes to sell 60 spots to vendors at the Orientation Trunk Sale this Sunday to raise money for the United Way of South Niagara.



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Michael Mann

Michael is a member of the corporate-commercial team at Lancaster, Brooks & Welch, where he provides advice regarding the various methods of carrying on a business. He assists in the incorporation and organization of companies and drafts security agreements, shareholder agreements, leases, franchise agreements and other documents of a corporate or commercial nature for clients. Michael also provides services as a registered trademark agent.



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Niagara man's design right on the money

KARENA WALTER
Postmedia Network

As a new coin collector, Wes-

ley Klassen enjoys keeping an eye out different types and trying to find them in his pocket

change.

The idea that one of those Royal Canadian Mint coins may bear a design of his own in the future is amazing.

"To get this far, I feel like a winner already," said Klassen, who was announced as a finalist Tuesday in the Royal Canadian Mint's My Canada, My Inspiration coin design contest.

The 49-year-old St. Catharines man's design featuring iconic images from across the country is one of 25 chosen from more than 10,000 entries.

He found out in early August he was a finalist, but had to keep it secret until Tuesday.

"I have not been able to share this until today and it has been agonizing keeping it to

myself, but for good reason," he laughed.

"Today, it's been an emotional roller coaster with it going public on the Internet. It's just amazing."

Klassen, an electrician with Ontario Power Generation, has no formal art training but enjoys painting, sketching and photography as a hobby. He credits his parents with instilling the gift of creativity in their children — his father, John Klassen, designed the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake crest in 1971 with no formal training either.

About a year ago, Klassen said a friend got him interested in coin collecting and he learned about the mint's contest from an e-mail.

The idea for his coin featuring Canada's achievements started with Sir John A. MacDonald's 200th birthday anniversary this year and his promise to connect Canada from coast to coast by railroad. Klassen based the sketch around the train idea but wanted to tie it together so it represented as much of Canada as possible. Starting from east to west, he added fishing boats, a lighthouse and Peggy's Cove, Chateau Frontenac, the CN Tower, Prairie grain elevators and Lions' Gate Bridge in B.C.

"The Canadian mint is probably one of the leaders in the world in making coins. It's phenomenal the detail that they can put on a coin, regardless of how small it is," he said. "I real-

ized I had the ability to put a lot of detail into the coin."

The contest was launched in April to celebrate Canada's upcoming 150th anniversary.

Canadians were invited to submit designs in five categories celebrating the country's wonders, character, achievements, passions and future.

The mint narrowed down the entries to five finalists in each category. Among the guest judges were astronaut Chris Hadfield, Paralympian and advocate Rick Hansen, former Governor-General Adrienne Clarkson and Free the Children co-founders Craig and Marc Kielburger.

Klassen's Coast to Coast design is up against submissions in the achievements category by residents from Ottawa, Halifax, N.S., Buchanan, Sask., and Delta, B.C. — the latter design is also called Coast to Coast.

The winning designs will be featured on five, 10- and 25-cent coins and the one and two dollar coins. They'll be circulated in 2017.

The public can vote for their favourite design in each category until Oct. 9 at www.mint.ca/Canada150.

Christine Aquino, director of communications and public affairs at the Royal Canadian Mint, said it's rare the mint invites the public to submit designs.

It receives hundreds of coin suggestions a year from people, so it decided to invite Canadians to design coins for Canada's 150.

"There's quite a wide array of designs to choose from so we were absolutely thrilled with the response we received," she said.

The five winners will receive \$2,000 each and a trip to Ottawa for the unveiling of their coins.

"To have the opportunity to design a circulation coin comes along once in a generation," she said.

Klassen said it would be an honour to be chosen and have his design become part of Canadian history.

He encouraged people to go online and vote.

"I'd be happy if it was for me but I still encourage everybody to go online and vote for whomever their favourites are," he said.

It's something he did on Tuesday in all the categories.

"I am very impressed," he said. "There are some absolutely wonderful, creative, artistic designs."

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Mom's wisdom provides fodder for first book

SARAH FERGUSON
Pelham Network

What was meant to be a birthday gift for her daughter became Jennifer McKenzie-Pellegrini's first book.

Something You Should Know:

A Gen X Mother's Guide to Life for Gen Y and Z Daughters offers youths advice about life in a "fun and witty way," says McKenzie-Pellegrini.

"I didn't really set out to write a book," says the Fort Erie resident and former journalist who

has worked at publications including *The Fort Erie Times* and *The Standard*.

McKenzie-Pellegrini's daughter, Madeleine, was about to turn 15.

"We didn't really have a birthday present for her. I thought 'I've got nothing for her to open.' All these thoughts started coming into my head."

After McKenzie-Pellegrini made dinner for her family and cleaned the kitchen, she set to work writing down some of her thoughts about life.

"I sat down at the kitchen table and I started typing," she says.

"I remember that I wished I had the thought of it out. I printed it out and stuck it in a gift bag."

Although McKenzie-Pellegrini's thoughts were written on plain paper, her daughter enjoyed every word.

"She read it and said it was really good. I told her it was for her and she said 'Yeah, but it's really good. Mom. You should do something with it.'"

Harding grew up in the 1980s. McKenzie-Pellegrini's world view was shaped by a variety of events including Live Aid, tearing down the Berlin Wall and the Challenger space shuttle explosion. McKenzie-Pellegrini says it made sense to name the book *Something You Should Know: A Gen X Mother's Guide to Life for Gen Y and Z Daughters* because it represents a mother passing her advice and wisdom to her daughter, who is part of the next generation of women.

McKenzie-Pellegrini also named the chapters after some of the music she listened to as a teen.

"The first chapter is Don't Stop Believing by Journey. Then there's Modern Love by David Bowie and Under Pressure by Queen and David Bowie."

McKenzie-Pellegrini offers a wide variety of advice, which includes purchasing "red lipstick and a nice pair of shoes to make you feel good about your self."

McKenzie-Pellegrini says her book talks about "the importance of making a good choice for yourself when it comes time to have sex."

"I want my daughter to do what's right for her and to make the best possible decision."

Other advice McKenzie-Pellegrini offers includes handwriting thank-you cards and Christmas cards, to be charming, to be witty and to "use sarcasm sparingly." "to play classic music really loud when you're home alone" and "if you have no one in your life to buy you flowers, then buy your own."

"The book talks about all the stuff my mom taught me, the thing I wish she'd have taught me and other things I learned the hard way," McKenzie-Pellegrini says. "When I was writing this book, I wanted it to be a little bit funny."

Most of all, McKenzie-Pellegrini says she hopes the book encourages her daughter to take chances in life.

"You don't know. Anything can happen. You can be struck with an illness and die and you never get the opportunity," McKenzie-Pellegrini says. Two of the smallest words that have the biggest impact are "What if?"

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Study weighs the causes of the 'Freshman 15'

MICHELLE ALLENBERG
Pelham's News

First-year Brock University students are needed to participate in a research study about the dreaded 'Freshman 15'.

This term is used to describe the affects first year can have on a student. Researchers from Brock's kinesiology department are studying what the transition from high school to university does to a person.

"People are aware of the fact that first year is challenging, and the students are getting younger," said kinesiology assistant professor and research lead Andrea Josse.

The pressures and issues that they face coming into university are real and they are of concern. We want to make sure our students have the best possible experience. Not just in first year, but that they are equipped with information and tools that they need to succeed. Not just academically, but emotionally and socially."

Josse said they would like to have as many students participate as possible.

Students who participate must be between 17 and 20. They will be assessed in September and then again in March, before exams. Josse said they will be asked nutrition information and take saliva samples, along with other information to understand the changes that occur.

Second-year master of kinesiology students Aysa Thomas,

“We started last year with our first round of participants and we are just hoping to get more participants to be signed up to complete the study this year. The more students we have the more accurate our data will be.”

Aysa Thomas

23, and Kayleigh Beaudry, 22, are conducting research with Josse's supervision for their theses.

Thomas's research will focus on physical activity, while Beaudry's research will focus on nutrition. They hope to have more participants this year so they can complete the study. Last year they only had about 65 participants complete the study.

"We started last year with our first round of participants and we are just hoping to get more participants to be signed up to complete the study this year. The more students we have the more accurate our data will be."

said Thomas.

Beaudry said the importance of doing a study like this is that since this is the start of adulthood it sets your habits for the rest of your life.

"Starting out of university and becoming your own adult and becoming very independent is very indicative of the life-style habits you are going to have through the rest of your life," said Beaudry.

The study, which will be published in an academic journal, won't be completed until fall next year. The researchers

weren't able to comment on their findings yet, but Beaudry did say the information they have gathered so far is interesting.

Thomas is hoping that with the data they gather "we can get some programs into place to help people. Kind of deal with eating on campus, or if they are not sure how to work out, help them with that. Ease them with the transition a bit."

Both students said they weren't immune to the Freshman 15 either. Beaudry said she was 100 per cent affected due

to not having any structure.

"You can do whatever you want, eat whatever you want,"

Thomas said even though

she was involved in sports, including rowing, she was also affected by the stresses of first year.

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■ MUSIC

Rock for Dimes rolling into Sherkston Shores

JOHN LAW
Postmedia Network

The weekend warriors return to Sherkston Shores this Friday.

The fifth annual Rock for Dimes fundraiser will gather part-time rockers and aspiring crooners alike for a musical getaway from their day jobs. Held at the Live Lounge on Empire Road, the jam session will feature five bands, one solo artist and benefits March of Dimes Canada programs and services for people with disabilities.

"It's men and women who used to play guitar when they were younger," says organizer Dennis Ullman of Bowmanville. "They put their guitars in the case, went off to school and got married and had kids. Once their careers were established, they trade their briefcases in for their guitar cases."

The event used to be a corporate battle of the bands, says Ullman, but it will be a straight-forward concert this year.

On the bill will be Neptune Manor, Jeff Poolton, The Wilbur James Blues

Band, The Michael Moses Band, The Moonlighters and The Julian Paul Band.

Rock for Dimes is held in several communities across Canada each year, raising more than \$1.2 million.

Proceeds from the Sherkston Shores show benefits the March of Dimes' Campers Helping Campers program.

Since it began, the local show has raised nearly \$13,000. The target this year is \$5,000.

"To be a full-time musician is a real challenge in this day and age," says Ullman, who drums for a band called Eastview. "It's a lot of fun, the bands are very supportive of each other."

He organizes many Rock for Dimes shows, and says Niagara stands out.

"My experience across Canada is that Niagara has a very unique music industry. There's all kinds of bands, and you don't see that in other areas."

"In Niagara, there's all kinds of bands out there interested in doing whatever they can."

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DON FRASER

Postmedia Network

A \$46-million arts school is drawing its curtains to hundreds of students, on time and on budget.

On Tuesday, Brock University's Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts kicked off its first academic year, with classes at the Carlisle and St. Paul streets facility starting the next day.

"We're imagining 450-500 students coming in, using the building," said Derek Knight, the school's director. "There will be wonderful energy that these 18- to 21-year-olds generate ... as they harness their creative abilities."

A flurry of work has gone on behind the scenes this summer to make it all happen. A move-in to the school actually started on June 23.

"It was a really interesting strategic planning effort," Knight said. "Imagine the prospect of moving tons of equipment, let alone the things typical in a theatre arts or music program."

"It ranges from lighting to pianos and things like that. And putting all that stuff where it might belong."

The downtown site will be a new home for the university's departments of dramatic arts, music, and visual arts, and the centre for studies in arts and culture.

It includes 50 full-time faculty members, part-time instructors and staff and up to 500 students.

Facilities include art studios, a framing shop and art stores, digital classrooms, music practice rooms, a stand-alone 235-seat theatre, wardrobe, design and scene shop, rehearsal rooms, learning commons and a student gallery.

"The last few weeks, we have already

begun to see lots of very curious students coming through," he said. "To a person, they're absolutely knocked out by the facility and the building itself is spectacular."

Meanwhile, the \$60-million FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre next door is set to open its 95,000-square foot complex this fall. The venues at the City of St. Catharines facility include Partridge Hall, Cairns Recital Hall, Robertson Theatre and the Film Theatre.

Students from the school will make use of two performance venues as learning environments — Cairns Recital Hall and the Film Theatre.

"Use of the Cairns Hall is really important for our music program," Knight said. "It has a capacity of 300 seats and we'll be using through the course of the working week."

The film theatre, he said, will function as the school's lecture theatre during the weekdays.

"This is part of a very unique relationship the university has with the city of St. Catharines," Knight said. "It's all part of the idea of building a creative cultural cluster here."

Arts centre executive director Steve Solak said the arts centre will be open with partial occupancy for students on Wednesday as planned.

"We're working towards the (official) opening of the arts centre ... we're just a couple of weeks away from announcing that date," he said, adding centre staff are looking at a time in mid-October.

Testing will be done throughout the venue as staff learn the systems inside, he said.

"We're given a shell of a building, so we set up equipment to make it ready for performances over the next several weeks," Solak added.

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■ **MUSIC:** Tim Hicks bringing his Get a Little Crazy Tour to Niagara

Singer 'can't wait to bring this train home'

JOHN LAW
Postmedia Network

It'll be another homecoming at the Scotiabank Convention Centre.

St. Catharines country star Tim Hicks will play the Niagara Falls venue Nov. 27 as part of his Get a Little Crazy Tour. The headlining tour sees Hicks cross the country for 14 dates, starting Nov. 1 in Sault Ste. Marie.

Fan pre-sales for all shows starts at 10 a.m. Sept. 8. General public sale starts at 10 a.m. Sept. 11.

It marks the largest show Hicks has played in Niagara, and for good reason: He has never been bigger. His sophomore release, *S.O.I.*, peaked at No. 7 on the Canadian country charts last summer, and gets a special edition re-release Sept. 4 with four new tracks.

He's up for three awards, including Album of the Year, at the Sept. 13 Canadian Country Music Association Awards. He'll perform live at the show in Halifax.

When reached Monday, Hicks said he was anxious to head home.

"I can't wait to bring this train home to Niagara," he said. "It's been far too long since we've played locally, and I've never been more excited to play my hometown."

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JACK BOLAND/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

St. Catharines country star Tim Hicks returns to Niagara to play the Scotiabank Convention Centre Nov. 27.

Year and Country Artist of the Year at the 2011 Niagara Music Awards, Hicks has stormed the Canadian country charts with hits like *Get By*, *Here Comes the Thunder* and the new *Young, Alive and in Love*. He was nominated for Country Album of the Year and Breakthrough Artist of the Year at last year's Juno Awards.

In March, he'll play Australia for the first time with two shows at the CMC Rocks QLD Festival.

Hicks' 2015 tour will also see stops in Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Vancouver, London and Oshawa. Opening for him will be Jason Benoit and Cold Creek County. Tickets for all shows will be available at www.GetALittleCrazyTour.com.

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